

MEDIA COVERAGE

VLL

AMERICANS should not be content with the current law. The ban, passed in 1994, extended only to the manufacture and importation of semiauto-

public support. And now the ban has the support of the president. He should give the legislation more than a few good words. ■

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To the Editor
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Pollution chart toppers

With three cities, including Nashville, still in the top 25 of the American Lung Association's list of most ozone-polluted cities, the state has a long way to go to clear the air.

Still, there are successes as Nashville's move from 18th to 21st shows. Chattanooga bounded out of the top 25 altogether. Memphis slightly improved its ranking to 18th. Even Knoxville with the worst pollution in the state showed modest improvement. High ozone causes breathing problems especially for the elderly, the young and those with asthma.

Cooler temperatures are being credited for diminishing the amount of ozone in the air, which can hamper breathing and foul the view. But ozone is the problem that won't go away without considerable help from government regulation. With power plants, automobiles and other sources interacting with the considerable heat in the "South," the problem must be addressed at the source.

Certainly, local efforts to monitor car emissions have helped Nashville and other cities in controlling pollutants. Tennessee's four major cities all require emissions testing. But the best local efforts can't act as well as national attention to cleaner-burning cars and power plants.

The Bush administration insists that a largely voluntary system allows

Local anti-ozone efforts need the help of strong national policies

ing plants to swap credits is the answer instead of "new source review" that would require any additions to plants to be vetted for stronger controls. The Tennessee Valley Authority, for example, already has reduced its ozone emissions 50%, according to its spokeswoman. It plans to reduce remaining ozone emissions by 75% over the next two years.

Yet the ozone remains a constant threat to the health of humans as well as the region's natural treasures. The Great Smoky Mountains National Park has seen its scenic views increasingly reduced during summer months because of the high ozone levels. Automobiles contribute to the ozone problem but so do the coal-fired power plants.

Cities help illustrate the problem of high ozone levels, but they can't solve the problem alone. The nation's 25 most polluted cities should be a priority in Washington as well as close to home. ■

Make it tough on DUIs

No drunken driver should be on the road, but the most deadly people driving are the repeat offenders — those considered hard-core drunken drivers by federal authorities.

The National Transportation Safety Board is putting a new emphasis on hard-core drunken drivers. By one estimate, less than 1% of the nation's drivers make up 27% of the drivers involved in fatal accidents. The hard-core group includes those who continue to drive while drunk despite prior arrests or those caught with a blood-alcohol level of almost twice the legal limit.

The board's finding is not surprising, but it is a call to focus on the worst of the worst. It doesn't take a repeat offender to kill people, but it's the repeat offender who presents the greatest risk to others. States must get those offenders off the road.

The board recommends measures that would end the sort of plea bargaining that gets drunken drivers off

Hard-core drunken drivers pose the greatest threat to highway safety

Treatment programs are valuable and should continue, but if hard-core drinkers are involved, they need tougher punishment.

Tennessee does not have a good record in establishing tough drunken driving laws. Most improvements on DUI laws in this state have come with a lot of foot-dragging by legislators. But it's time for every state to wake up to what drunken drivers are doing to innocent people.

National Transportation Safety Board Chairman Ellen Engleman

don't ready have a say in what happens on the administrative level."

"This year has prepared me well for next year, probably because I've had a lot of interaction with the board members and the staff," said Amiee, a junior at Hume-Fogg. "If there's a problem, I'm not as afraid to speak up. And I think that's a part of what you have to do to be a president of Interhigh. Get those problems out there."

But before some 30 gathering.

berland Apartments on Church Street and Premier Parking downtown, said that the Church Street change would make driving easier for his tenants, and that increased drivability could only help businesses.

"As a parking operator, I feel the changes proposed will increase the user-friendliness of the downtown streets for visitors that are not necessarily accustomed to driving downtown," he said. "I think there's a broad consensus that these would be positive changes for downtown Nashville." ■

lead tourists to downtown destinations.

Traffic engineers from the Atlanta office of Parsons Brinckerhoff Quade & Douglas prepared a report analyzing the impact of several traffic options. They presented a computerized model of the study to the Traffic and Parking Commission last month, and an information session was broadcast live recently on Channel 3.

Metro Public Works scrutinized the plan and has given it the go-ahead.

"Overall, we've determined that

business owners, community members, planning officials and designers — that met weekly for several months and spent about a year reviewing and revising a proposal that addresses the area as a whole.

"For the first time at least in a long time, we've looked comprehensively at downtown and how to make it a more rational place to get around," said Rick Bernhardt, Metro Planning director and chairman of the Partnership's steering committee. "That was the focus: how to develop a complete net-

work between Demonbreun and Union streets; and Church Street would be straightened and become a two-way.

The proposal would affect several other streets, but most discussions have centered on changes to Third Avenue North and Union Street, said Ed Owens, chairman of the Metro Traffic and Parking Commission.

The Third Avenue change could eliminate some parking spaces, Owens said, and the Union Street change could have tour-bus passengers exiting across the street.

Officials: Nashville must 'get real' about air quality

Meeting EPA standards will require sharp cut in number of vehicles on road

By ROSE FRENCH
Staff Writer

Some 175,549 drivers would have to stay home each day — or choose alternative modes of transportation — if the Midstate is to meet new, more stringent Environmental Protection Agency air-quality regulations. That's what officials with the Nashville Area Metropolitan Planning Organization told government leaders during a meeting of the regional planning body Wednesday.

The session gave local officials a glimpse of just how painfully challenging it will be to get air quality in Davidson County and the rest of the Midstate up to snuff over the next several years, when nitrous oxide must be reduced by about 20% to meet new EPA ozone standards.

"This is not something that's going to be as simple as buying

new (commuter) van pools," said Jeanne Stevens, MPO coordinator. "The number of people we have to get off the road — it's going to be challenging. We're going to have to look at a blend of other control measures, like getting more people to use alternative fuels, really getting the word out on the ozone action days, not to mow or drive to work those days."

Unless air quality improves, the Nashville area could begin to lose out on new business, as well as sacrifice federal money for new road projects. It's why Davidson and several other Midstate counties have forged the Early Action Compact, an agreement with the EPA to clean up the air on an accelerated time schedule.

County and city staff officials

"Until those people (elected officials) see a real problem ... it's not going to happen," said Bill Terry, Goodlettsville director of planning and codes.

Jim White, a transportation consultant with the Greater Nashville Regional Council, echoed that sentiment:

"We're going to have to, to quote Dr. Phil, 'get real,'" White said. "All the quick fixes have been done. We've got to get busy. We've got to get serious."

— Jim White, a transportation consultant with the Greater Nashville Regional Council

Past efforts to clean up the nation's air have focused on large utilities and heavy industrial polluters. Today, however, with on-road vehicles contributing to much of the country's bad air quality, regulators are concentrating more on getting individuals, not just business, to do their part, Jones said.

In 1999, most of the harmful nitrous oxide emissions — some 54% — in the Nashville region were created by on-road vehicles; off-road vehicles, such as construction machinery and lawn equipment, came in second with 18%. Electric utilities were third with 11%.

The MPO consists of both elected and staff officials representing Davidson, Rutherford, Sumner, Wilson and Williamson counties, as well as cities in those counties with populations of more than 5,000. The board provides policy direction and a forum for transportation and air-quality decisions. ■

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State hopes to double transit riders

City's system applauded for its efficiency

By TODD DEFEO
The Leaf-Chronicle

Emily Kennedy has been riding the Clarksville Transit System for 16 years and has ideas for increasing ridership — run buses later weekday evenings and more frequently on weekends.

"I feel strongly about that," she said after a Wednesday meeting focused on doubling public transportation ridership in Tennessee by 2025.

Clarksville experienced a 37 percent population growth between 1990 and 2000, compared to a 16.7 percent increase in Tennessee. Across the state, a 25 percent growth is estimated between 2002 and 2025.

Officials contend population growth and an increase in automobile ownership are clogging the state's roadways, damaging the environment and slowing economic growth. And much of Tennessee's working population, between 79 and 85 percent — drives to work alone.

"Increasing transit ridership is critical to Tennessee's future," said Gerald Nicely, TDOT commissioner. "As Tennessee grows and changes, the state's ability to handle transportation will determine its financial and environmental health."



Donna Wilson/The Leaf-Chronicle

Clarksville Transit System's rider numbers have grown each year since beginning in the late 1980s, and Director Jimmy Smith hopes the number will surpass 600,000 by June 30. The Tennessee Department of Transportation wants to double the number of transit riders across the state by 2025, and officials were in Clarksville last week seeking riders' input.

"Increasing transit ridership is critical to Tennessee's future. As Tennessee grows and changes, the state's ability to handle transportation will determine its financial and environmental health."

Gerald Nicely

commissioner, Tennessee Department of Transportation

tem for the large area they have to cover."

CTS operates seven routes in a 107-square mile system.

About 80 percent of the capital money comes from the federal government, while state and local governments split the remaining 20 percent. Federal and state money each pays for about 35 percent of operating costs, while the city picks up the remaining 30 percent.

"It's a service area that's comparable to Chattanooga, which has a service area of 128 square miles," said Ben Smith, TDOT director of Public Transit, Railroad and Waterways. "Clarksville is running a very efficient sys-

Statewide goals

The state's Department of Transportation has started a comprehensive, first-of-its-kind study of transportation in Tennessee. The "Transit for Tennessee 2025" plan will detail the services necessary to double the number of transit riders in the next two-plus decades.

Planning now for a balanced transportation system

► See Transit, A2

Commuter rail line to Nashville revisited

By TODD DEFEO
The Leaf-Chronicle

A commuter rail line connecting Clarksville with Nashville could be studied again this fall, Regional Transportation Authority officials said.

A commuter rail connecting the two cities was determined to be unfeasible after a 1996 study by the RTA, the Nashville Metro Transit Authority and the Nashville Metropolitan Planning Organization. The study considered two routes between the Queen City and the Music City.

One route would follow the former right of way of the now-defunct Ten-

nessee Central Railway. Tracks once ran from Clarksville through Ashland City and to Nashville.

"This line is abandoned and track has been removed from east of Ashland City to Clarksville," said Allyson Shumate, rail projects coordinator for RTA.

"The portion between just east of Ashland City and the Cumberland River is not in use because the Cumberland River Bridge is in need of work."

In addition to bridge work, the Tennessee Central route would require all new track and improvement of trestles and

► See Rail, A2

Fed to dr key i agai

Reserve to stave price de

By MARTIN CRU
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Federal Reserve this week to d terest rate to it since President second term.

The central bank is aiming to stave off a nomic threat at Great Depression, a prolong spread decline

Policy-makers mounted a virtuoso performance

over the past six weeks to influence financial markets without even cutting rates. That should allay any worries th

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Transit

Continued from A1

and efficient land use can ensure the state's economy remains vibrant, without encouraging sprawl and congestion, which can damage air and water quality," Nicely said.

The transit study will be incorporated into TDOT's Long Range Multi-Modal Transportation Plan, which is being drafted. Both the long-range plan and "Transit for Tennessee 2025" are expected to be completed by 2004.

Statewide in June, the Department of Transportation has been seeking input from residents during a series of public forums. Such a meeting was held Wednesday evening at the Clarksville-Montgomery County Public Library.

"The more suggestions and feedback we get from citizens, and especially from transit users or potential users, the more successful our plan for the future will be," Nicely said about meetings like the one at the library. He did not at-

tend the Clarksville meeting.

And a second round of public meetings is scheduled for the fall in Chattanooga, Nashville, Knoxville and Memphis.

At Wednesday's meeting, Ben Smith outlined some issues that need to be addressed if ridership is to double. Funding, technology, capital facilities, a rising demand for paratransit, service development and marketing and land use planning and development were among them.

In 2000, the state spent about \$22.3 million on public transportation. That increased to \$30.5 million in 2003.

Public transportation serves about 1 percent of all of the state's work trips. For transit use to double by 2025, annual ridership must increase 3 percent each year.

Todd DeFeo covers criminal justice and can be reached by telephone at 245-0236 or by e-mail at todddefeo@theleafchronicle.com.

Rail

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"The study estimated that the track work alone could cost in the \$70 million range," Shumate said. "That cost does not include signals, land or bridges."

A second rail line option would run trains from Clarksville to Nashville via Guthrie, Ky. The tracks between Clarksville and Guthrie are owned by R.J. Corman, and CSX holds the rails between Guthrie and Nashville.

Officials said numerous options are available with the route, including required track upgrades, but it is less direct than the Tennessee Central route.

Cheatham County Executive Bill Orange said a commuter rail between Nashville and Clarksville is feasible, but admits "it won't be easy or simple to bring (the Tennessee Central line) back."

He added: "More roads are not the answer; we've got to get commuter rail."

Other commuter rails coming along statewide

Other commuter rail routes in

Middle Tennessee are being considered as possibilities for alleviating highway congestion.

Nashville is developing a commuter rail project on five corridors centered on the center of the city," said Ben Smith, TDOT director of Public Transit, Railroad and Waterways.

Rail lines connecting Murfreesboro to the southeast, Hendersonville to the northeast, Franklin to the south and Bellevue to the west have been studied.

"These were determined to be feasible per the study," Shumate said.

The southeast and northeast have the greatest ridership potential and congestion relief."

Murfreesboro, LaVergne, Smyrna and Rutherford County are working with the Nashville MPO to begin a corridor analysis, the first step in the federal funding process. It will determine different modes for the corridor and determine the practicality of each.

A rail line connecting Lebanon and Nashville is expected to be in operation by fall 2005. That line is projected to be the first leg of the Nashville Area Regional Commuter Rail System, which, when completed, would shuttle commuters throughout Middle Tennessee.

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problems to extreme absenteeism and overall carelessness about school performance. But their goals remain the same: They all want to be like their friends, in high school. In six weeks, Amanda and others will go through an academic and social boot camp just to catch up on the basics. For example, they'll drill on grammar and multiplication tables. They'll read and

— ROSE FRENCH

AL CARE

r gets health

flows into the river from Metro area wastewater treatment plant in Memphis and Dry Creek in the Rivergate area. The plant has received several awards for its National Pollution Elimination System.

—REBECCA DENTON

This is the second summer that Metro has offered the classes, after piloting the program in 2000. Last year, 197 of the 244 kids who finished the transition program were promoted to high school. "If those kids could go back and change their circumstances and do better, they would," said Gene Foster, who oversees summer programs in Metro. "Kids can get into a hopeless situation when

Second chance

And they need hope desperately, said Eric Spear, one of the program teachers at Overton High. During the regular school year, Spear teaches at McMurray Middle. He is in his second year with the transition classes. "Once a kid reaches the age of 15 and they know they're older than everybody else, they shut

ond chance." But is that second chance a realistic expectation after only six weeks of intense instruction? "Will we teach them everything they need to know for ninth grade? No way," Spear said. "But if these kids go back to seventh or eighth grade, they're going to be complete failures on the middle school level just because they're too old. We're giving them the

high school," Morgan said. "we go over my expectations. I tell them what they will have to do as freshmen. I even tell them how to put a notebook together."

Amanda said it's a privilege to be in the transition program. "A lot of kids get held back, but they don't get this chance. If I had to go back to middle school, it would make me feel like I haven't accomplished anything." ■

THE ENVIRONMENT POLLUTION CONTROL

New technology curbs emissions from idling trucks

By ROSE FRENCH

Staff Writer

Technology that curbs dirty emissions of idling big-rig trucks — already being used in a handful of places across the country — is set for a Nashville-area debut this fall. Planners and government officials think the truck electrification system could turn out to be a significant salve for the Midstate's chronic bad air quality, much of which is caused by larger, diesel-powered vehicles, planners say.

The system gives truck drivers the option of plugging into electrical units at truck stops, so they can turn off their engines yet still have access to air conditioning, heating, TV viewing and other conveniences for the long-haul lifestyle.

Traditionally, big-rig truck drivers have kept their engines idling during required rest periods or while waiting to load. Trucks that have refrigerated trailers — typically cooled by an independent, diesel-driven cooling unit — also could use the

additional power source when parked.

Using electricity instead of diesel fuel significantly reduces emissions and noise, said Tom Badgett of IdleAire Technologies Corp., a Knoxville-based company that installs the units at truck stops and other locations. "Because of the environmental aspect of this, we're being contacted by a lot of Metro areas with air quality problems, who want us to come there sooner rather than later," Badgett said.

IdleAire has installed units that are up and running in five locations, with five more under construction and several more planned, Badgett said.

Uncle Pete's truck stop off Interstate 40 near Exit 23 in Lebanon is scheduled to get the electrification units this fall, Badgett said.

"We're just finishing a site in Memphis and already have sites in Knoxville, Atlanta and New York," Badgett said. "It would be natural thing for us to build out in the Middle Tennessee area, too."

IdleAire technology gives truckers the option of plugging into electrical units at truck stops so they can turn off their engines yet still have access to air conditioning, heating, TV and other conveniences.

SUBMITTED PHOTO



The technology, created by IdleAire, is being lauded by Environmental Protection Agency officials as an effective way of decreasing pollution caused by the idling trucks. Jeanne Stevens, coordinator for the Metropolitan Planning Organization, said local leaders think the truck electrification technology could take a big bite out of the Midstate's air quality problem.

Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation data for the eight-county Nashville region shows that about 60% of pollution from vehicular emissions comes from heavy trucks. "We're a major distribution

hub, so we have a high percentage of trucks coming through this area, and a lot of them stop," Stevens said. "Diesel engines really are the heaviest polluters. When you look at the state estimates, it's clear that reducing truck idling would make a significant contribution to improving air quality."

State Rep. Joe Armstrong, D-Knoxville, sponsored a bill this past legislative session that proposed imposing idling restrictions on big rigs. The bill never emerged from the House transportation committee but could be revived.

Badgett said the electrification technology is catching on like

wildfire with truckers, who are standing in line to use it at truck stops. Truckers rent the equipment for \$125 an hour — as opposed to idling, which costs about \$2 an hour, Badgett said. Truckers also sleep better in a noiseless, non-shaking rig powered by electricity instead of diesel fuel, he added. It costs about \$10,000 a space to install the units, with 50 or more spaces typically needed at each truck stop. Truck stop owners contract with IdleAire, which then installs the technology. Badgett said IdleAire recently received a \$1 million federal grant to offset costs of installing units in more locations.

Nashville and several other Metro areas in Tennessee with poor air quality are working to meet new Environmental Protection Agency guidelines that require nitrous oxide emissions to be reduced by about 20% below current levels.

Unless air quality improves, the Nashville area could begin to lose out on new business, as well as sacrifice federal money for new road projects. Stevens said some state and local agencies may look into providing funding to encourage use of the truck electrification technology. ■

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